

I was born on the West side of Grand Rapids. My Uncle John lived next door and was the primary male role model in my life. Uncle John taught me how to fish, play the piano and took me camping. When I was 8 years old, Uncle John brought me to a little building on Ironwood Drive in Marne, Michigan. This little building had been the site of Ottawa Display Fireworks, a small Michigan company that manufactured display fireworks in the 1940's. People may remember fireworks that would burst into an American flag at the Grand Haven Coast Guard Festival fireworks back in the day. This type of firework was manufactured on site at Ottawa Display Fireworks. The property and building were sold to the Picard Family who began to sell fireworks to the public. My uncle and I spent many more years going there on Fourth of July's to pick up different items for our northwest neighborhood celebration.

I worked at Michigan Bumper, working my way through Grand Valley State University. In my 30's, I had the opportunity to purchase this property from the owner who was looking to retire. Eventually I left Michigan Bumper and worked at building a seasonal wholesale and retail firework business selling fireworks to convenience stores, groups that sold fireworks for fundraising, as well as operating seasonally out of my location on Ironwood, in Marne. Ottawa Display Fireworks has sold to several generations of families who maintain the tradition of getting fireworks for their neighborhood celebrations, just like I did with my uncle. I do the work of bagging firework assortments, sales and delivery to small, locally owned mom and pop stores. I operate under a firework permit for "resident wholesale dealer's or jobbers possession of fireworks" granted to me in 1985 that is nontransferable. As I am almost 63 years old, and this permit is non transferable, I want to continue under this permit for the few years I have left before retirement.

I pay my property, sales and income taxes to the State of Michigan and Tallmadge Township. For decades, I have maintained low prices for the community, wholesalers, advertised in local newspapers, maintained insurance requirements and donated fireworks to various, local nonprofit groups for Fourth of July celebrations. My children have worked for me, as they have worked toward paying off state of Michigan college tuition and expenses.

House Bill No 599 is being funded and supported by a couple of large firework companies that are attempting to establish restrictions that will make it financially difficult for small people (like myself) to comply with. Although, parts of the bill contain sensible restrictions on safety and usage, many of the bills provisions contain arbitrary and capricious features designed to make compliance difficult for existing small business owners. The end result is that small people (like myself) who have paid their dues, taxes and invested their dreams in the State of Michigan will be unable to meet many of these restrictions, thus forcing us out of the firework business that has been our living for most of our lives. I believe I am being denied due process to continue working at my established small firework business due to influence from big business fireworks. As I have a nontransferable permit, I request that my local firework business be grandfathered in to continue to sell to my community at low prices, advertise in local newspapers and continue to serve the local nonprofit camps and associations with donations of firework supplies for their celebrations.

Ron Barstow
5/5/10